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RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 3549  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 4710  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [KCOR](#) [BF](#)  
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT IN THE SUNSHINE: INGRAHAM ROLLS OUT  
AGENDA

REF: NASSAU 646

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. D. Brent Hardt for  
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Ingraham rolled out his government's plans for The Bahamas at the ceremonial opening of parliament May 23. Picking up on his campaign theme of restoring trust, Ingraham pledged to focus on good governance, accountability, transparency and respect for human rights. The agenda closely parallels U.S. hemispheric goals for strengthening democracy, including promises of a Freedom of Information Act, public disclosure of contracts, ethical standards for Ministers and improvements to the judiciary. It also pledges several other items in line with U.S. priorities, including reduction of time to trial, improvements in the immigrant detention center, increased capacity for the Defense Force and improved airport security. The speech signaled a change in economic development strategy, shifting focus from development through foreign investment to development through stronger local businesses. The speech made only a fleeting reference to foreign policy issues in its pledge to stand up for human rights, reinforcing the perception that the government will follow a pragmatic approach to its international engagement, working closely with the U.S. and avoiding the previous government's non-aligned activism. END SUMMARY.

Responsible and Transparent Government a Priority  
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12. (U) The new Bahamian government presented its agenda to the Bahamian people May 23 in the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor General at the ceremonial opening of parliament. The speech laid out Prime Minister Ingraham's agenda with the theme of "restoration of responsible, responsive and transparent government in the sunshine." To achieve these goals, the speech rolled out an ambitious agenda that included accession to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the development of a Code of Ethics for Government Ministers, and the creation of an Office of the Ombudsman to address public concerns regarding Government behavior. It also promised a Freedom of Information Act, public provision of details regarding government contracts, and passage of a National Investment Act to create "transparency and clarity" in government investment priorities and "a level playing field for both

Bahamians and international persons."

#### Strengthened Judiciary and Improved Human Rights Promised

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¶3. (U) The government's agenda responded directly to growing concerns over the inefficiency of the Bahamian judicial system, promising to strengthen the judiciary with more judges, quicker trials, and full compliance with Constitutional requirements for judicial independence. To address related human rights concerns over prison overcrowding and persons being held for unreasonable time in prison while awaiting trial, the government promised improved bail laws, electronic monitoring of persons on bail, and revised sentencing guidelines to eliminate jail time for first time non-violent offenders. Tackling another human rights issue flagged annually in our human rights report, the Government promised to refurbish and upgrade the detention center used to house illegal migrants.

#### Improved Airport Security

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¶4. (U) Following reports of breaches in airport security and persistent failure to meet security standards, the government has given priority to efforts to improve security standards at Nassau's international airport and other Bahamian airports. It also promised a complete redevelopment of the airport to meet the growing demands of the tourism industry. The previous government had pledged such a redevelopment to major hotel developers to keep pace with the industry's growth, but took five years to negotiate a management contract. Aviation Minister Neko Grant has made clear that aviation security and safety and friendlier air travel are

his top goals.

#### Defense Force Upgrades

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¶5. (U) To address the sensitive problem of illegal immigration, the government promised to upgrade the Royal Bahamas Defense Force (RBDF) presence in Great Inagua, the southern Bahamian island closest to Haiti. Such a presence in the southern Bahamas will allow the RBDF to intercept Haitian sloops carrying migrants and illegal drugs and to keep out Dominican fisherman poaching in Bahamian waters. The restoration of funding and resources to the Defense Force follows a change in the Force's leadership last year that has thus far helped boost morale and effectiveness and promises to make the RBDF a better partner for the U.S. (reftel.)

#### Economic Policy Focused on Local Business

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¶6. (U) The government's agenda is decidedly pro-business, promising to streamline the small business startup process, increase government loans for small- and medium-sized businesses in tourism, food-processing and light manufacturing, and promising to reduce taxes on commercial properties. But there is also has a nationalistic tinge to the FNM's economic policy that could put at risk some foreign investments already on the books or in final stages of negotiation. While the government affirmed its openness to foreign investment, specifically recognizing the importance of international investment in hotel and resort sector, it also promised to encourage Bahamian boutique hotels, lodges and inns to compete with foreign investment, review (increase) taxes on foreign-owned property, and develop policies to limit foreign investment concessions and land purchase rights. Following their election criticism of the Christie government for failing to reveal terms of highly touted investment deals, Ingraham in government is now promising to disclose in the House of Assembly all agreements with international investors.

Comment: Government in the Sunshine: Welcome Changes Long Sought

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17. (C) The Ingraham government's opening salvo in the Throne Speech offers much that is commendable and in line with U.S. goals in the hemisphere to strengthen democracy and support good governance. A Freedom of Information Act, public disclosure of contracts, ethical standards for ministers, improvements to the migrant detention center and reduction of time to trial are all issues raised in our annual U.S. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. We have also advocated for attention to these issues in OpEd's, digital videoconferencing, speaker programs and regular diplomatic engagement. If the government follows through on this list, it will significantly strengthen the country's governance. The strong commitment to airport security and planned improvements to upgrading the Defense Force are also in line with longstanding U.S. priorities. Only the nationalistic tinge to the government's economic approach -- a product of campaign rhetoric that accused the PLP of selling off Bahamian lands to foreigners -- could negatively affect some U.S. investors seen as too close to the former government. Overall, Ingraham's first salvo suggests he has a clear vision for how to achieve his "responsible, responsive, and transparent government in the sunshine."

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